

EUROPE MUST TACKLE FATAL FIRE SAFETY FLAWS

FIRE-RELATED BUILDING STANDARDS AND CONSTRUCTION REGULATIONS ACROSS THE EU HAVE BEEN BLASTED AS “OUTDATED AND A PATCHWORK OF INCONSISTENT REGULATIONS” IN A DOCUMENT RECENTLY RELEASED IN BRUSSELS BY FIRE SAFE EUROPE – A BROAD ALLIANCE OF FIRE EXPERTS, FIREFIGHTERS AND EUROPEAN AGENCIES.

More than 4,000 people are killed by fire every year in Europe, and improved EU-wide building fire safety regulations are urgently needed to save lives, according to a White Paper recently issued by Fire Safe Europe (FSEU).

The White Paper was launched in Brussels to coincide with meetings between Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and firefighters from the European Fire Fighters Unions Alliance (EFFUA), who are campaigning to improve fire safety in buildings for European citizens.

The Irish Fire and Emergency Services Association (IFESA) is a member of the European Fire Fighters Unions Alliance, and its chairman John Kidd was in Brussels for the launch of the White Paper.

“These days it seems we are fighting buildings on fire not fires in buildings,” said Mikael Svanberg of the EFFUA, a fire officer with 25 years of experience. “Fires are now more unpredictable, bigger and more dangerous while buildings are more complicated and modern construction materials are not necessarily fire safe. I no longer know what to expect when I’m called to a fire and I’m taking more risks.”

Czech Republic MEP Pavel Poc said: “We urgently need to take action to save lives. We spend 90 per cent of our time in buildings – homes, offices and schools – and this is where 90 per cent of fires occur.

“The loss of 4,000 lives every year is unacceptable but in addition to these tragedies nearly 200 people every day are hospitalised due to smoke and fire while the risks facing our firefighters continue to escalate.”

OUTDATED REGULATIONS

The FSEU’s document highlights how existing fire-related building standards

and construction regulations across the EU are outdated and a patchwork of inconsistent regulations, particularly in public buildings such as hospitals and schools.

For example, in Germany the distance to a school fire exit is 10 metres compared to 60 metres in Italy. German MEP Jens Gieseke said: “Any loss of life resulting from outdated regulations is not acceptable. Therefore, I absolutely support the harmonisation and upgrade of fire safety regulations for buildings at EU level.

“As the situation in some member states showed, there is an enormous potential to improve safety standards EU wide. Joint action needs to be taken to use this potential and to ensure that the highest standards are achieved in all EU countries.”

Earlier this year 78 European Parliamentarians standing for election in 2014 pledged their support to put building fire safety at the heart of the EU’s political agenda. “We call on all members of the European Parliament to work for fire safety in buildings,” said FSEU President Barry Lynham.

“In the 1950s it would take around 15 minutes for a full blaze to take hold, but today a big fire is out of control in under three minutes. Now more than ever it’s time for the European Parliament to wake up to the threat of fire in our buildings,” he stated.



*The European Fire Fighters Unions Alliance (EFFUA) is an international alliance of independent trade unions solely representing firefighters and a wider range of occupations. www.fffua.org

*Fire Safe Europe is a broad alliance of fire experts, firefighters, international companies and European associations, and construction sector manufacturers and material suppliers such as insulation, cable, concrete, ceiling and fire protection equipment. www.firesafeeurope.eu